

The Massachusetts Smallpox Preparedness Program

What is the Massachusetts Smallpox Preparedness Program?

The Smallpox Preparedness Program is the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's (MDPH) initiative to develop the ability to detect, treat and prevent the spread of smallpox. The Smallpox Preparedness Program is part of MDPH's broader emergency preparedness efforts, intended to maximize the public health system's defenses against possible bioterrorist acts.

Why is a Smallpox Preparedness Program Necessary?

Smallpox was a serious disease that killed 30-50% of people who became infected. An unprecedented global public health effort resulted in the eradication of smallpox in the 1970's. Following eradication, smallpox vaccination was discontinued and stockpiles of the smallpox virus were destroyed. The only known remaining samples of smallpox virus exist in laboratories in the US and Russia. There are concerns, however, that there are stockpiles of the virus in the hands of organizations, states, or terrorists, that could potentially be used as a biological weapon. While the likelihood of an intentional release of smallpox is small, the reintroduction of smallpox into an unprotected population could be devastating. The Massachusetts Smallpox Preparedness Program will maximize the Commonwealth's ability to respond quickly should a smallpox outbreak occur, minimizing the impact on our society.

What Are the Key Elements of the Smallpox Preparedness Program?

Enhanced Surveillance

Early identification and immediate reporting of suspected smallpox cases are key to containing the spread of the disease. If a case or outbreak

were to occur, increased surveillance for febrile rash illness would be critical to containing smallpox. The MDPH is working with healthcare providers and laboratories to ensure the rapid detection and containment of a smallpox outbreak.

Education and Training

A smallpox outbreak would require isolation of confirmed and suspected smallpox cases coupled with identification, vaccination, and close surveillance of their contacts. Healthcare workers and first responders are being educated and trained on procedures to ensure rapid containment of smallpox and treatment of patients should an outbreak occur.

Hospital Surge Capacity

Should a smallpox outbreak occur, hospitals might become quickly overwhelmed. Planning is underway to ensure that isolation and care of smallpox patients can occur with minimal exposure of unvaccinated personnel and patients to the disease. Massachusetts has divided its hospitals into six regions to promote collaboration and planning for a large influx of patients.

Pre-Event Vaccination Program

MDPH is coordinating the vaccination of 10,000 volunteer healthcare workers, public health workers, and first responders. Vaccinated volunteers will serve on the Commonwealth's public health and healthcare smallpox teams. These teams would be mobilized in the event of a smallpox emergency so that unvaccinated workers would not be exposed to smallpox.

"Pre-event" refers to the fact that these volunteer teams will be vaccinated now - before any smallpox event occurs. Additional details about the pre-event vaccine program are presented on the reverse page.

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Information about Pre-Event Smallpox Vaccination

What are the key components of the Pre-Event Smallpox Vaccination Program?

- ◆ Vaccination of a statewide public health team to coordinate response activities.
- ◆ Vaccination of volunteer multidisciplinary teams in acute care hospitals to safely receive, isolate, and care for people with smallpox.
- ◆ Vaccination of regional smallpox response teams who would be prepared to provide patient care and transport, specimen collection and transport, medical diagnosis, site security, contact investigation and event management.
- ◆ Vaccination of additional public health nurses and other health care workers who would be prepared to administer vaccine to others and assist in mass vaccination clinics if the need were to arise.
- ◆ Extensive education and careful screening of all potential volunteers to ensure that individuals have the information they need to make informed decisions about serving on a smallpox response team.

When Will Vaccinations Begin?

Vaccination of the first response team members began on February 12, 2003. These team members will be vaccinating hospital clinicians who will serve as vaccinators for volunteer hospital employees across the Commonwealth. The timetable for vaccinations at hospital sites will be dependent upon each hospital's internal plan. Following vaccination of the hospital teams, MDPH will begin training and vaccinating volunteer regional response teams.

Who is Eligible to Volunteer to Serve on the Smallpox Response Teams?

Acute care hospitals in the Commonwealth were asked to recruit multidisciplinary health care teams who could care for the first few smallpox patients that might present at the hospital if there were a smallpox outbreak. Staffing for such an emergency varies by hospital.

The regional response teams will include public health nurses, first responders, medical professionals, law enforcement, epidemiologists, laboratory professionals, and local officials. MDPH will work with communities and professional associations and organizations to provide potential volunteers with the information they need to make informed decisions about vaccination and participation on these response teams.

For more information, please call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health at 617-983-6800, or visit the MDPH website at www.state.ma.us/dph or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov/smallpox.